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Australian Military Aid To Indonesia

by Richard Tanter

The Australian Government recently announced that it will expand its military assistance programme to Indonesia, currently running at about $7 million a year, with an additional gift of six Nomad Searchmaster reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft worth a total of $10 million.

The aircraft, which follow 12 other Nomads either given or sold to Indonesia by Australia in recent years, are intended for use in countering smuggling and illegal fishing, and to this end have been fitted with sophisticated electronics equipment and all weather radar.

The reconnaissance and surveillance capacities of the aircraft are potentially of more direct military significance to the Indonesian navy and airforce. A most important part of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor has been a highly successful physical and information blockade of the territory, which has prevented the outside world from ascertaining the truth of conflicting claims about the on-going war there, and has also prevented aid and church organisations from sending much needed food and medical supplies. The Nomad aircraft and other parts of the Australian military aid programmes such as patrol boats boosted the Indonesian capacity to maintain such a blockade, whether or not they were actually used in East Timor itself.

The provision of military aid to a neighbouring country is one of the most direct expressions of alliance and shared goals to be found in international society. Indonesia receives large amounts of military aid from the United States and Australia, and spends large amounts of its foreign exchange on arms purchases. The Australian military aid, while small in relation to the total Indonesian military expenditure, is a palpable symbol of our Government's support for the uses to which Indonesia's military capacity is put.

Since 1974, Indonesia has been the largest recipient of Australian military aid after Papua-Niugini and the 1978-79 estimated expenditure was $6,900,000.

The expanded, regular programme to Indonesia was established, in a rather *ad hoc* way with the 1972 offer by the McMahon Government of 16 ex-RAAF Avon Sabre fighter aircraft. In succeeding years the programme underwent rationalisation and has now taken on the common pattern built around a number of core projects which continue for several years. Such projects currently include a maritime patrol project (aircraft, patrol boats and advisors), a joint topographical and geological mapping project, provision of field communications equipment and helicopters, a long-standing co-operative military research programme, joint exercises and training facilities. In addition a regular intelligence exchange programme operates.

Maritime Patrol Project

The largest single item in the current Indonesian programme is the Maritime Patrol project involving the provision of Nomad aircraft, 16m. De Havilland patrol boats, refurbished ex-RAN Attack Class patrol boats and an RAN advisory team. This project typifies the nature and difficulties of the aid relationship in policy terms.

Since 1973 12 Nomad aircraft have been donated or sold to the Indonesian naval forces (and the recent announcement will take the total to 18). Manufactured by the Government Aircraft Factory, the Nomad N22B Searchmaster was specially developed for reconnaissance and surveillance work to Indonesian requirements. The electronic surveillance equipment provided other than weather radar is not known, but after a government-sponsored bid to support De Havilland sales it was claimed that "the new surveillance version of the Nomad, known as the Searchmaster and costing $900,000, is better equipped with radar than any plane in the RAAF. It is fitted with a Canadian-built Litton LSR-2 ground and sea surveillance radar which can pick up objects over a radius of 100 nautical miles." (Weekend Australian June 17-18, 1978)

Ex-RAN Attack Class patrol boats of 146 ton displacement have been refitted and handed over to the Indonesian Navy in recent years. De Havilland Carpenteria 16m. patrol boats complete the equipment provided in this programme. The patrol boats (at least the 16m. craft) are handed over without armament, but are readily fitted out with a variety of weapons.

The stated intention of this project is to provide the Indonesian

Navy with facilities to combat international and domestic inter-island smuggling. Undoubtedly this goal has been enhanced, but more importantly, the naval and air surveillance capacity thus provided by this Australian equipment has very substantially added to the ability of the Indonesian armed forces to carry out its invasion of East Timor and to maintain an active counter-insurgency campaign in West Irian.

A crucial (and continuing) part of the Indonesian strategy in the invasion of East Timor was the establishment and maintenance of a blockade around the whole island of Timor, to prevent the movement of news and information, medical and military supplies, food or people into East Timor except under Indonesian control. The Indonesian air and naval surveillance capacity together with the Indonesian Government's refusal to guarantee non-combatant status to barges loaded with medical supplies from Australian church and aid groups, led to the Australian Government's refusal to allow the barges to sail.

Although the Australian Government has received assurances that Australian-supplied war material will not be used in operations in East Timor, there have been no opportunities to verify this claim. Moreover, as a number of observers have pointed out, the militarily significant consequence of the Australian co-operation is that the new surveillance and interception equipment increases the overall archipelagic military capacity of the Indonesian armed forces, and releases equipment supplied by other sources for use in the East Timor war.

Sioux Helicopters

Similar considerations apply to the transfer of Sioux helicopters, worth an estimated $2 million in 1978-79. Presumably formerly in service with Australian forces, these aircraft increase the mobility of Indonesian armed forces. This project is linked to the simultaneous expansion of Indonesia's helicopter forces in other directions. In recent years Bell helicopters have been ordered or purchased from the USA, and licensed production of two European military helicopters has been commenced: the Messerschmit-Bohm-Bolkow MBB 105 and the larger Aerospatiale Puma.

The development of more mobile military force is considered a necessity given the tactical requirements of counter-insurgency operations in the mountainous territory of West Irian, and the encirclement and annihilation tactics used by the invasion forces in East Timor.

Sabre Aircraft

In 1973, 16 ex-RAAF Avon Sabre fighters were handed over to the Indonesian Air Force, and since that time Australian training and support staff have remained at Iswahyudi Air Base in Java. (The *Defence Report, 1975* stated that the RAAF Sabre Advisory Unit was disbanded in February 1975, (p.12) but large amounts of money continue to be spent on this project.) The costs of this advisory team have been surprisingly high. In some ways, this project is a legacy of the early phase of the defence co-operation programme in which political expediency outweighed technical rationality, in which surplus and obsolete equipment was commonly supplied.

These aircraft have not seen combat service in Indonesia, and have been of limited use to the recipients. However, the aircraft have undoubtedly been a stepping stone for training and planning purposes in the recent expansion of the Indonesian Air Force with more modern equipment.

Field Communication Project

This project commenced in 1972 with a grant of 500 field transceivers; indeed between 1972 and 1975 1,261 field transceivers were turned over. The current stage of the project has provided decentralised repair facilities for field radio transceivers. Clearly, this project contributes to the capacity of Indonesian military forces in their operation in West Irian and East Timor.

Training programmes

Since 1971, at least 890 Indonesian servicemen have received training in a wide variety of courses, in Australian military establishments. Although small-scale officer training commenced in 1962 no specific appropriation was made until 1972.

The actual numbers have fluctuated a great deal, but in the past two years, proposed expenditure has settled at $150,000. Courses attended in the past have included full-length Duntroon officer training, staff courses for senior officers at the Queenscliff Australian Staff College, the Canungra School of Military Intelligence, flying and ground crew training, and others.

The training of foreign personnel is a key part of all military assistance programmes and is a long-standing part of Australia's programme with Indonesia. But in recent years, bitter criticism has been mounted against such programmes.

In the first instance, the Indonesian Government has given no assurances that those of its servicemen who have trained in Australia, or who have been trained by Australian advisory teams in Indonesia, will not be used in the invasion of East Timor, or in counter-insurgency operations in West Irian, or in incursions on the territory of Papua-Niugini. Indeed, the Indonesian Government could not give such assurances, since these trainees would later rejoin their units, and in the "normal" course of events, be sent with them to East Timor on tours of duty there. In fact, it is more likely that *Australian trained personnel* would be involved in the war, since they would have been selected for training on the basis of their future leadership prospects, and hence would more than likely be placed with the rather small part of the Indonesian military which is actually capable of difficult combat operations of the type required in East Timor rather than the normal and sedate activities of village control by surveillance in Java and elsewhere. This aspect of Australia's defence co-operation programme with Indonesia undoubtedly constitutes a powerful indirect form of support for Indonesia's aggression against foreign countries in the region.

Claims were made in 1974 that the training of Indonesian officers in intelligence work included training in hostile interrogation.

The commanding officer at the Woodside, S.A., Army Intelligence Centre in May 1974 confirmed that a number of Indonesians had been and were continuing to be trained in interrogation techniques, and the Minister representing the Minister of Defence in the Senate confirmed the essence of the claim in July 1974.

The courses have now been transferred to the Army School of Military Intelligence at Canungra. The courses symbolise the Australian Government's willingness to co-operate with representatives of a government who utilise an unknown

array of advanced and basic torture techniques against citizens of their own country and others, as part of the day to day functioning of the military's role in that country. Witnesses amongst Timorese refugees reaching Australia and Portugal have reliably reported that Indonesian Army intelligence officers have frequently tortured East Timorese civilians in the course of hostile interrogations in Timor.

Survey and Mapping project

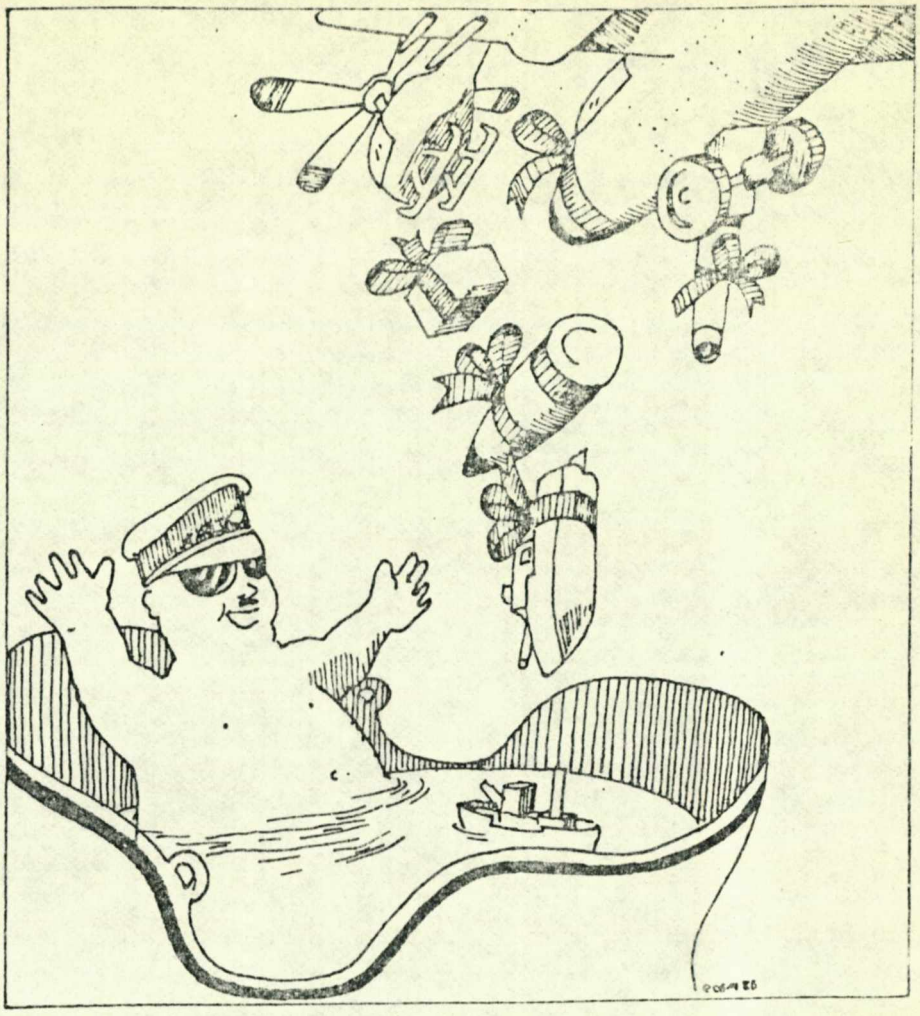
Since 1970, Australian Army, Air Force, and Navy have co-operated with Indonesian civilian and military units in a series of large and complex topographical mapping and surveying projects commencing in Kalimantan, extending to South Sumatra and from 1976 to the present in West Irian.

The importance of the Australian contribution of advanced technology to the West Irian project is clear. Traditional methods of surveying would have been quite inadequate for the extremely difficult terrains of West Irian.

The nominal aim of the West Irian topographical survey, together with a parallel civil aid geological and gravity survey (to be conducted over a period of 10 years at an estimated cost of $6.2 million), is to enhance "planning for national development". In a strict sense this is true: the two surveys will make possible the penetration of remote areas by government administrators, business enterprises and so forth. They will also greatly assist in the location and exploitation of mineral deposits.

Yet it is important to understand that the goal of "national development" is not an agreed goal in West Irian. Indeed, one authority has shown that the Free Papua Movement (OPM) has its roots in widespread village-based opposition to the *particular* form of economic development which is being imposed by the central (in fact, largely Javanese) Indonesian government authorities on the reluctant West Irianese (Nonie Sharp *The Rule of the Sword*, 1977).

The two surveys will provide indispensable tools for the activities of Indonesian armed forces in their persisting and bitter campaign to break the broad-based power of the OPM. Only the Australian high technology surveying facilities will give the result Indonesian counter-insurgency operations require: accurate and detailed maps and precision



aerial photography in extremely rugged, unfamiliar and hostile territory.

Hence there can be little surprise that West Papuan guerilla fighters have claimed that the Australian project is providing direct military assistance to the central government's ability to bomb and strafe villages, their populations and crops. Spokesmen for the OPM threatened the Australian military personnel and equipment involved, and subsequently claimed responsibility for the crash of an RAAF helicopter in which one person was killed. The Prime Minister in response claimed that the mapping project was "entirely peaceable". In fact, this technically true answer may be beside the point, since more detailed and accurate information has established that Indonesian Air Force aircraft have attacked villages in areas where Australian personnel had previously worked.

Beyond the question of the political desirability of co-operation in such savage repression of Indonesia's own citizens, it is important to understand that the project, certainly in the eyes of the Indonesian military authorities, has two, interrelated goals. In the context of West Papuan society, the form of economic development proposed (and imposed) by Jakarta, for which the two surveys are necessary, is in itself the prime cause for the opposition, sometimes in military form, which the mapping will assist the authorities to attempt to destroy. Only in the most short-sighted of policy considerations is the mapping "entirely peaceable".

Research and Development

A small but continuing item of expenditure that has received surprisingly little public consideration is an apparently long-standing programme of co-operation between the Indonesian and Australian military research and development sections. According to the *Defence Report, 1974* this dates back to 1974. Indonesian State Radio, however, claims it began in 1970 and has given this statement of its purpose:

"Since 1970, Indonesia and Australia have co-operated in defence research and development mainly in

upgrading the skills of . . . personnel in finding rockets which are suitable for the Indonesian armed forces".

This was reported in the context of proposals by Indonesia and Singapore to utilise expertise from the Weapons Research Establishment to assist missile development. Little is known about past and continuing aspects of this project, but it is particularly important given Indonesia's purchase of weapons using extremely sophisticated missiles: Korean Tacoma-class patrol boats using Aerospatiale Exocet missiles, and the US Northrop F-5E Tiger II and British Aerospace Hawk HS 1182 ground attack aircraft.

This Australian project constitutes direct encouragement to this regional tendency to expand the number and sophistication of weapons.

Joint exercises

Since 1972, at least six joint naval and air exercises have been conducted with Indonesia. Although early in 1977 Indonesia declined an Australian invitation for naval exercises because of differences in views about the Indian Ocean, in November that year the exercise Southern Cross II was held in the Coral Sea with two Indonesian destroyer escorts, three Australian large ships, a submarine, patrol craft and RAAF aircraft. At least one other exercise has been held since that time.

Some ACFOA Recommendations on Australian Military Aid

1. Military aid policy should be seen in terms of overall foreign policy which should be directed at the peaceful encouragement of change towards more equitable distribution of resources, less political repression and denial of human rights and a lowering of the rate of military expansion in the area.

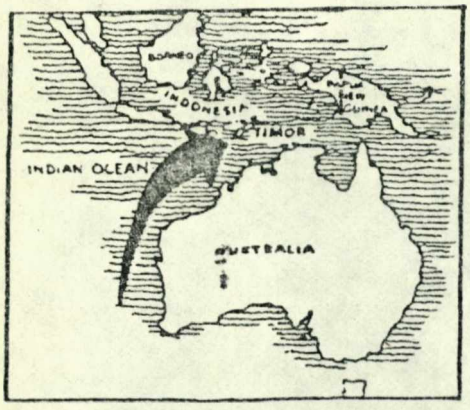
2. Some criteria which should govern the allocation of military aid by Australia are:
   - the external defence needs of the recipient country;
   - the risk of increased militarisation of the economy, administrative apparatus and foreign policy of the recipient country;
   - the human rights record of the recipient country.

3. Military aid projects should be separated out from civil aid programmes and subjected to the above criteria.

4. The link between military aid and Australian domestic production should be prevented.

5. The Government should work to reduce the level of armaments to the region and outlaw the use of inhumane weapons.

(From the ACFOA submission to the Harries enquiry on Australia's relations with the Third World, Nov. 1978).



EAST TIMOR our nearest neighbour in need

The East Timor Relief Appeal is working for three concerns: 1) to bring relief to the suffering of East Timor, 2) to reunite separated families, and 3) to assist Timorese refugees in Portugal.

The Appeal is sponsored by Australian Catholic Relief, Australian Council of Churches, Austcare, Community Aid Abroad, Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Save the Children Fund, and St Vincent de Paul.

Donations may be sent to East Timor Relief Appeal, GPO Box 9900 in any capital city.